

- Report No. 114
- May - June 1994

# Women's Concerns

Report

## "Hi Preacher!"— Women in Pastoral Ministries

The summer Sunday afternoon was hot and clear. I locked the door to the church office and checked for lights left on in the classrooms. As I stepped outside into the bright solitude, I was overwhelmed with what a lonely business the ministry is.

I was 25 years old, 1,200 miles from home, pastoring a congregation in North Newton, Kan., population 1,200, if you could believe the sign at the city limit.

The streets, as usual, were empty as I walked home, except for a child wobbling along on a bicycle. "Hi preacher!" he yelled, then turned the corner and was gone. As he disappeared, my moment of loneliness disappeared too. Preacher. In that moment, I was the luckiest woman alive, for that word and all its attendant meaning applied to me.

Much has happened in the last quarter of the century in the Mennonite church. Patterns of church leadership are being rearranged and redesigned, eliminating the obstacles to women's full participation in the church's ministry. Despite a church tradition once grounded in what were considered appropriate places for men and women, many women have been given the opportunity to respond to God's call in their lives. Some waited a lifetime for the church to include them. For others, the wait continues to be a long, arduous one.

Throughout our denomination, churches are at different places in their involvement of women in positions of leadership and decision making. Women themselves have experienced conflicting feelings over their desire to offer the church their gifts as ministering persons. The secret inner longings and urges to use one's gifts were quelled by the encouragement of a theological tradition that named self-denial and self-sacrifice a virtue. Not wanting to abandon their reliance on outside authority or abandon the affirmation of the call of the church, women felt driven back from saying "yes" to God's call, because that outside authority had remained silent, or ignored them or treated them unfairly.

Women have made significant strides in the last 20 years, but I would be remiss if I did not emphasize the distance that remains to be travelled in overcoming the obstacles that still prevent women's full acceptance into pastoral ministry.

The articles in this issue of *Report* offer way stations, roadside views of what lies behind us and before us. Each of these women have been a catalyst for change, working to secure a hope-filled future where women find their rightful place in ministry and value the contributions they make as ministering persons.

—by Renee Sauder

Renee Sauder and Sue C. Steiner helped to compile this issue. Renee serves as pastor of the Erb Street Mennonite Church, Waterloo, Ont., and Sue is pastor of St. Jacobs (Ont.) Mennonite Church.



by Beth Ranck Yoder

## Joy and Pain on an Unexpected Journey

Our congregation's path to calling a woman to serve on the pastoral team might be described as a natural unfolding of who we are as a congregation. For many years, Perkasie Mennonite Church has been a place where women have participated fully in all aspects of congregational life and leadership. Women have served as song leaders, worship leaders, speakers/preachers in the pulpit, and as elders and committee chairpersons, including serving as chair of the board of elders and of the congregation. It seemed very natural to take the next step and in 1987 we called a woman to serve on the pastoral team.

We were not able to do so, however, without going through a two-year period of conflict, tension and pain. To use the title "pastor" and to request ministerial license for a woman was to cross a line that mattered a great deal to some among us. The two-year process was difficult and costly. We found ourselves no more friendly with conflict than many of our sister Mennonite congregations, and no less fatigued and wounded by riding its storms. Several families chose to take their membership elsewhere in the course of our moving through the "women in ministry" issue.

Barbara Esch Shisler's eventual ministry among us as the first woman called to the pastoral team was very much appreciated. When new leadership was needed in 1989-90, the congregation was open to considering a male/female team for long-term pastoral leadership. In September 1990 I began a three-year term as part of a two-person (male/female) term. My role has included a portion of all parts of the pastoring in our congregation: preaching, serving with committees, administration, pastoral care and officiating at occasions such as weddings, baptisms and funerals.

My own path to becoming a pastor can probably also be described as a natural unfolding of who I am, but I more often think of it as a circuitous, indirect and rather surprising development. In 1990 as I was entering the pastor role, I found myself saying, "I have come to a place that I never set out to get to or expected to be in...and I have gotten here by listening as best I could to that which was within me and

allowing something deeply rooted in me to move out into expression."

I did not set out to arrive at this place. In college I tried on several majors (none of them Bible or religion), but finally settled on English as the one that best gathered my interests together. My first professional employment was as an English teacher at Christopher Dock Mennonite High School where I taught for six years. I enjoyed the classroom very much, but there were two other places that also kept calling and that I kept going back to, in zigzag fashion—theater and seminary.

The first time I entered seminary was in 1976 when I spent a year at AMBS in Elkhart immediately after graduation from Goshen College. The second time I studied for a year at Princeton Theological Seminary after my husband and I returned from a year of teaching in China. Each time I went to seminary it was on a quest for more substance to my faith, or to gain greater academic integrity for my faith, or to find a way for my faith to catch up with the rest of my growth. One thing I was always very clear about upon entering seminary: I was not preparing for congregational ministry.

The needs and invitations of my congregation began to change that certainty, however, during the year of study at Princeton and in the years following. The Bible courses that I had taken at Princeton became the basis for several adult Sunday School classes; I began to serve on the worship committee and eventually to chair it as well. Over the course of several years my gifts of teaching, being up front, leading worship, writing worship materials, and eventually preaching were called into use and affirmed by the congregation.

Ironically, the other magnet in my life seemed also to be drawing me close to congregational ministry. Just as I seem to keep ending up in seminary, so I keep finding my way into things having to do with theater—years of being a high school drama coach, completion of a master's degree in theater, and a one-year stint of employment in a children's theater troupe. At a point of un budging, gray depression about six years ago, with the help of active therapy, I began to do what I'd always written off as impossible: I began to bring together my love of acting and drama with participation in church experience. My contributions in the congregation began to include "sermons" that were dramatic performances of scripture that I memorized, and then monologues that I wrote based on scripture. Increasingly, there was a coming together of the congregation's needs and responsiveness, my gifts and abilities, and my joy.

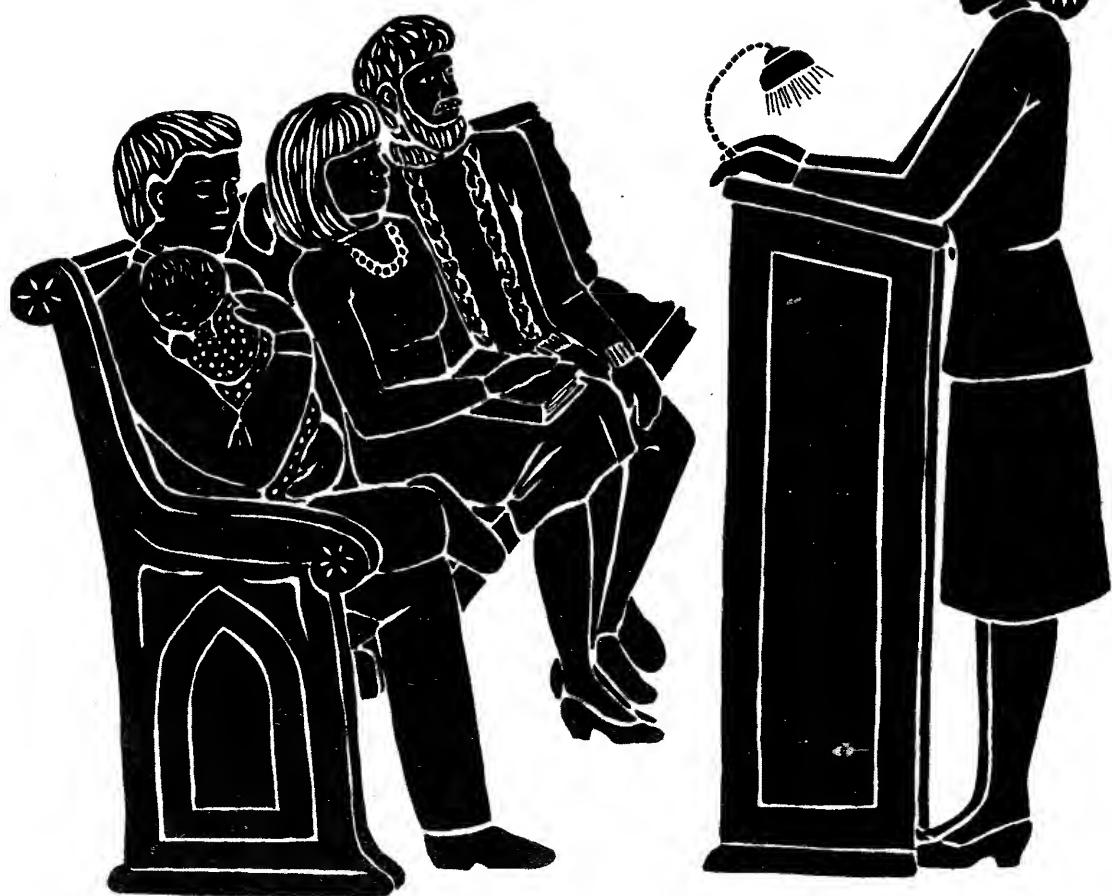
**“...I have gotten here by listening as best I could to that which was within me and allowing something deeply rooted in me to move out into expression.”**

Just as the congregation was unable to take “the natural next step” without walking through pain and struggle, I too found the natural next step to be one that led into and through places I would rather not have gone. When the official process began and the pastor “mantle” descended, I entered my own personal crucible.

I began discovering the unwritten assumptions that I (and others?) had about “pastor”—pastor as answer-giver, as one who has an appropriate thing to say at any occasion at the drop of a hat, as one whose job it is to be knowledgeable about and responsive to the emotional, physical, spiritual (and perhaps financial) needs of each person in the congregation. I began discovering the unwritten reward system for

male and female roles: my husband received many accolades for being such a good father as he took his turn at rocking, burping and changing the baby while I was preaching or in committee meetings; I received the dubious, damning-with-faint-praise title “Superwoman.”

In this crucible I began feeling full-tilt the aloneness of a role so previously and thoroughly all-male; I had no mentor to turn to, and for a while no fellow travelers. I began experiencing the shock, wave after wave, of seeing this exclusion of women from the pulpit as symptomatic of generations of silencing women in the church—particularly the silencing of women’s anger or pain. And I began experiencing for myself, in myself, the lesser value that is placed on women,



**"But even in the darkest, most dry part of the path, joy has been threaded through the pain."**

the assumption of greater strength, more knowledge, more competence assigned to men. My private refrain during those first several years was, "This is the worst decision I have ever made."

But even in the darkest, most dry part of the path, joy has been threaded through the pain. Joy and pain have lain very close together in these years of initiation. One particularly demanding week of pastoral care carried examples of the two sides of this experience of being a woman in ministry. Early that week one of the women of the congregation admitted herself to the psychiatric unit of our local hospital, where she faced the long hard journey of recovery from childhood experiences of sexual abuse and incest. It felt so very right to both of us that the ministering person who would stand beside her was a woman. It seemed to me that a male pastor did not belong in that fragile, vulnerable place of a woman's first uncovering of deep wounds to her sexuality. Later in the same week, another woman in the congregation prepared to face a major surgical operation. As I visited with her and spoke to her about what lay ahead, she commented to me, "The last time I went for an operation, we didn't have a pastor either." (My male co-pastor was in Elkhart for a month of study at the time, and I clearly did not weigh in as a real pastor.)

This September marked the beginning of my fourth year in the pastoring role. There have been affirmations and expressions of support from both men and women as I continue to find my way in this place that I did not set out to get to. One blessing I particularly cherish came from one of the older women in the congregation, one whose theology differs considerably from mine and who disapproves of the dangling earrings I sometimes wear. In one of our phone conversations she said to me, "Bless you as you continue to minister to all of us." It was a moment of healing for me. And that is what I am coming to see—that this challenging, circuitous path that keeps bumping me into places that I would probably avoid if I could, is ultimately a path that leads further and further into healing and wholeness.

**Beth Ranck Yoder** lives in Perkasie, Pa., with her husband Jerold and their two young sons, Gregory and Justin. She pastors part-time at Perkasie Mennonite Church, keeps working toward a lifestyle that includes both physical and spiritual disciplines, and performs in things theatrical whenever possible.

**"These years have included some of my highest 'highs' and my lowest 'lows.' This has been a time of tremendous growth."**

by Martha Kolb-Wyckoff

## A Pastoral Journal

I am now in my seventh year pastoring at Taftsville Chapel Mennonite Fellowship. This has been my first experience in congregational ministry. These years have included some of my highest "highs" and my lowest "lows." This has been a time of tremendous growth. I've been enormously challenged and stretched. But the bottom line is that I wouldn't trade this time for anything in the world. I will tell my story via journal entries.

*November 17*—Here I am, my first morning in Vermont. It's a gray, cloudy day. I guess it matches my mood. I'm glad to be here, but I am also feeling very keenly my own inadequacy. Lord, I believe this is where I am to be right now, so I have to trust you for strength and for wisdom to meet the demands of the task. I feel very weak.

*December 14*—Forty years ago today the Paul Kolb family was graced with a new daughter. It was a happy day, particularly for Naomi who, as the only girl among six brothers, was absolutely ecstatic about a sister. It was a good family to be born into. My parents loved the Lord, and desired most deeply that their children would love the Lord as well. I was dedicated to the Lord by my parents and entrusted to God's care. They faithfully taught me, both by the example of their own lives as well as through Bible stories and family devotions. I grew up wanting very much to follow God and to be obedient to God's leading in my life.

And here I am at 40 years of age, beginning a new vocation, about to marry, on the threshold of what I believe will be an exciting and fruitful segment of life for me.

*January 19*—God, I'm so aware of how poorly I trust you. I so quickly take things into my own hands and then I end up getting frustrated and uptight. I am such a slow learner.

*February 4*—How difficult it is for me to trust you. And I am also aware that my inability to trust you, God, is creating for me a lot of stress and tension. I'm not trusting you very well with preaching, specifically, and ministry in general. I worry about not getting a sermon together. I worry about knowing what to preach. Another part of me knows that if I am called to this task, you will grace me with the wisdom and strength to do it. God, I believe that, but help my unbelief.

**"The way I see things happening now is that we are in the underground stage of growth. The seed is swelling, splitting open and sprouting, but as far as one can tell on the surface nothing is happening. But very important things are happening."**

Forgive me for my unbelief, for my failure to trust you in my life. I want to, with new energy and greater faith, live my life in light of your promises to "be with us always," to take care of us always as we seek first your kingdom, to give wisdom and insight in our weakness.

*May 4*—I need help in knowing where to put my energies. There seem so many directions I could go. Sometimes I feel very scattered. God, I need your help in discerning direction.

*August 23*—Gracious God, I need you. Life just seems so stressful right now—housing [we were in the process of buying a house], pastoring, my difficulty in loving myself. Help!!

*November 29*—It's a long time since I have written. Maybe the time has come for me to get back to journaling. God, I confess my neediness. I feel very needy and inadequate. And doubts are plaguing me. Am I really where you have called me? Is ministry right for me? How do I know what to preach? Was my decision to switch topics yesterday your leading or did I just give up because the first one seemed too difficult?

And then, God, I wonder if my ministry is effective or accomplishing anything. Am I successful? God, forgive me for wanting to know. Indeed, I do simply want to be faithful, faithful in declaring the whole Gospel, faithful in admonishing, encouraging and teaching.

*January 31*—I find the call, the task, doing me in. I must listen more closely to your call to me, dear God. You didn't ask me to do it. You simply asked me to be the available person through whom you can love others. God, I confess how hard that has been for me. I find myself taking the whole job on myself; I feel I need to do it.

God, by your grace I need to "let go." I need to trust your grace. I put such heavy demands on myself. How do I find the balance I can live with?

*April 13*—Lord, I have been shown once again my sin—my sin of worry, unbelief, failure to trust you. You know how big the task of ministry has seemed to me. I have worried about this and that—from how we will pull off Bible school, to how we will find people to do the work of the church, to how we will place the chairs. And all I am doing is making myself miserable and giving myself a negative outlook on things. God it is very hard for me to let go, to trust that you will help us find a way through. God, help me lose my grip

on those things I worry about. Help me to take one day at a time.

*August 15*—The summer is almost over and now it is time to think of fall and the start of a new year. It has been a difficult summer with mother's death on top of some other difficult issues. But I have felt very sustained and energized by God's Spirit. I believe there have been many prayers ascending on my behalf. Thank you God, for this kind of support.

*November 16*—Lord, help me relax and rest. Now I don't mean be lazy. But I need to find a balance between putting forth my energy and efforts, and allowing you to do your thing. Sometimes I have a hard time waiting for you. But if I don't wait for you, my efforts and energies will be wasted.

*April 24*—God, I am so aware of my "earthen vessel" status. I recognize my weakness and ordinariness. What I don't recognize as well is your transcendent power standing alongside my weakness and ordinariness. God, help me to know in the depth of my being that strength and power.

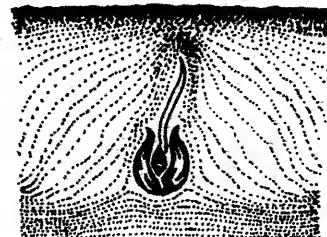
*July 17*—Lord, I have much to be grateful for. Ron has a teaching job, we had a good bike trip, we are well, our marriage is thriving. I am grateful for the congregation—their acceptance of me and my ministry, their warm acceptance of Ron, the small signs of hope and new life.

*August 13*—God, for renewed hope and energy I give you thanks. Things seem so different from what I was feeling last week this time. Thank you for a group with whom I can be vulnerable.

The way I see things happening now is that we are in the underground stage of growth. The seed is swelling, splitting open and sprouting, but as far as one can tell on the surface nothing is happening. But very important things are happening.

*September 12*—"In your love I am free to live with courage." God, help me to hang on to that promise. "You have not given me a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and self-discipline." (II Timothy 1:7)

*October 13*—We do not lose heart. We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the all-surpassing power is from



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**"I am coming to understand more and more that the main task of pastoring is to bombard the gates of heaven on behalf of God's people."**



God and not from us. We carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.

*March 16*—Monday morning again. I frequently write on Monday morning. This Monday I feel very warm inside. I'm glad to be me, to be where I am.

*April 30*—Do I minister in such a way that first and foremost I help people to know they are unconditionally loved by God? What would it mean if that was uppermost in my ministry? What would I change?

*June 25*—Yesterday I saw Anne [my spiritual director]. As I reflected with her, I realized that I am now in a very good place. She reminded me that in the rhythms of life it is OK to rest at times, to experience life free from struggles. God, thank you for the joy of ministry and marriage and middle age.

*November 5*—I've been thinking about prayer. I found myself thinking that if I pray more maybe more things will happen in relation to church. But I have got it all wrong. I pray more in order to know you better, God, to better know your mind and heart.

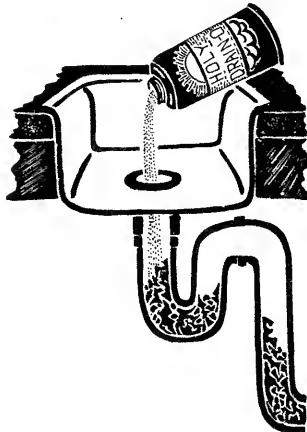
*December 10*—I was struck today by the scriptures from Psalm 67. God's blessing upon us is simply to enable us to bless others. When we keep God's blessing to ourselves we seriously violate God's intentions. God, help me to be a faithful steward of the blessings I know in abundance.

*December 14*—Today 45 years ago I was born. I wish I knew more about that day. I failed to ask Mother before she died. But I do know something about my life. It's been a rich life, not easy or without difficulties, but full, rewarding and blessed. I thank God for a wonderful congregation in which to do ministry. I stand amazed that even after five years they still seem happy to have me as pastor. It humbles me.

*March 30*—I just read a portion of Nouwen's *The Living Reminder*. I was reminded once again that the essence of

ministry is more in my relationship with God than in what I actually do as a minister. I get so caught up in the doing.

God, pour some "holy drano" through the connecting pipes between my spirit and your spirit. Get rid of the debris, clear the channels.



*June 2*—Yesterday I visited with Anne. I reflected on how I seem to be sure of less and less. At the same time I am more aware of God's presence and how God makes a difference in all things. My sense of dependence on God is greater than ever. I was reminded of the importance of spending time with God, letting myself be loved, cared for, empowered—I preach about "lap time" with God....

*August 12*—I am overwhelmed and awed by the task of pastoring. Can a human being do it? What does it mean to give vision and direction to your people? How to care for people who hurt? How to jar the comfortable out of complacency? Grace to confront with the hard questions?

I am coming to understand more and more that the main task of pastoring is to bombard the gates of heaven on behalf of God's people. However, that need must be balanced with time spent waiting in God's presence—confessing, listening, receiving.

*October 7*—"Fear not, the things that you are afraid of are quite likely to happen to you, but they are nothing to be afraid of."

The experience of ministry cannot be neatly summed up. It has been agony and ecstasy. It has meant disappointment and delight. But the one constant is the sustaining, enabling, empowering presence of God. For this I am humbly grateful.

**Martha Kolb-Wyckoff is pastor of Taftsville (Vt.) Chapel Mennonite Fellowship. She and her husband Ron enjoy biking, hiking and skiing. When she must be indoors, she reads.**

**"I pray—for strength to meet the challenges, for grace to accept my limitations, for patience as I wait for God's guiding."**

by Janeen Bertsche Johnson

## Wondering What Lies Ahead

I'm not sure long-term career planning makes sense for anyone in pastoral ministry, given the nature of the role. After all, who can predict the temperament of a congregation, the time of an "itch" to move on, or the occurrence of burnout, let alone the call of God? How can anyone know that in a certain number of years, she wants to be at a certain place doing a certain ministry?

And yet, I find myself wondering what lies ahead for me as a young pastor. Will I have the stamina and hear God's call to remain in pastoral ministry the rest of my working years? If I do, where will I be, and what will the shape of my ministry be? I imagine most pastors ponder the same questions. But for women in ministry, there are several issues that complicate the picture. As I consider the future, here are some of the questions I have:

1. How many churches will be open to having a woman as pastor? Will the number increase or hold steady? Churches with articulated theological positions against women in ministry seem unlikely to shift their perspective soon. Some churches are open to women, but want to alternate between having a female and a male pastor in order to maintain balance. And then there are several multiple-staff churches that are committed to having a woman as part of their team. I anticipate that the number of opportunities for women in ministry will hold fairly steady in these three categories of churches.

The key to increasing opportunities for women pastors will be in working with churches that have had a cultural bias against women in ministry. These churches may not quote biblical bias against women preaching or being in positions of authority, but the idea of having a female pastor just doesn't feel comfortable to them. They will say they aren't ready, or that people wouldn't accept it. Sometimes it's an image problem ("What would other churches think of us?"). Often there are unspoken issues of sexuality, power and envy that need to be addressed. These churches might be open to women as pastors in the future, given encouragement by conference leaders or positive experiences of female guest preachers or interim pastors. Often wife-husband teams working as co-pastors will be able to break down the barriers

in churches that have never experienced women as pastors. But will there be places for those who are not married to a pastor?

2. Will women be able to make the jump from associate roles to lead roles? Not every woman in an associate pastor or specialized ministry role desires a lead position, and many of us have difficulty with a hierarchical model of ministry. But for those who like serving in a team setting, yet desire more opportunities for preaching and leadership, there seem to be few options. Even in churches where women have been accepted as associate pastors for several years, there are a number of factors which may keep women from being called as lead pastors: a residue of resistance or discomfort with a woman having more power than a man, the awkwardness of creating balance when a female associate is already in place, or the difficulty of an associate moving into a lead role in the same congregation. Another reality is that fewer women than men have the years of experience that congregations are looking for in a lead pastor.

3. Have we created limited expectations for women and men in ministry? When we describe the value of having women as pastors, we often emphasize stereotypical feminine traits, such as warmth, caring and friendliness. But women have gifts for the ministry other than being "warm and bubbly" (that's what one search committee said they were looking for in a woman pastor). Will all of our gifts be valued? And what of women who do not fit the feminine stereotype? Will they find pastorate?

I have other questions as well, such as what a long-term career in ministry means for my family and my personal well-being, and whether women in ministry can find adequate support systems. Yet in the midst of all of my wondering about what lies ahead, I pray—for strength to meet the challenges, for grace to accept my limitations, for patience as I wait for God's guiding. Most of all, I pray that I will not feel anxious about the future, but instead have the attitude of "seeking first the reign of God."

**Janeen Bertsche Johnson is finishing her fifth year as associate pastor of Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church in Wichita, Kan. She is a 1986 graduate of Bluffton (Ohio) College and a 1989 graduate of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. She and her husband Barry, a math teacher in a Wichita high school, have a 20-month-old daughter, Hannah.**

**"Numbers of people have shared with me that they did not believe that women should be in leadership but they needed to affirm my calling as a pastor."**

**"I find myself increasingly free to speak from my heart without fear that it may not be acceptable to the listeners."**

by Grace Brunner

## From Pastor's Spouse to Pastor

I became a pastor in my mid-fifties. Since my whole life was spent either as a PK (pastor's kid) or a PS (pastor's spouse), the shift from spouse of the pastor to one of the pastors came more easily. But I remember the warnings of several pastor friends who reminded me of the stresses that team pastoring puts on a marriage. And, I sometimes think of the look in the eyes of people who did not feel that women should be pastors—including me!

I have found that acceptance of a woman as pastor often comes because of a personal relationship with that person. Numbers of people have shared with me that they did not believe that women should be in leadership but they needed to affirm my calling as a pastor. I would like to say that I have nothing to prove, but I still find myself in some tension—I want people to realize that a woman can be an effective pastor, that our Lord works through women pastors, that the church is the better because it has opened its doors to using fully the gifts of women. That is not a real pressure on me, but it is with me in many things I do, at least in the background, as I desire to be the best possible servant of Jesus Christ in the context of the church.

At this stage in my life, my family is grown and not living with us. This allows me much freedom to give time and energy to the ministry. Since there is much openness in the Mennonite church to using the gifts of older people, I continue to feel that there is a place for me and a job to do. Perhaps my grey hair elicits trust—or it may be that because I have lived with my share of grief and pain, there is a ministry of listening that is rewarding for me. I find myself increasingly free to speak from my heart without fear that it may not be acceptable to the listeners. I wish I had done that sooner, for I sense a hunger for that kind of honesty.

As a denomination we are moving in a positive direction in relationship to women in all areas of leadership. I am thankful that we pastored in a conference that was open to the use of women's gifts (Ohio), and that the Beech Mennonite Church was willing to push out its parameters and call me to be the associate pastor at a time when I strongly felt the call



to ministry. Kudos to my husband who encouraged my gifts and was open to a team ministry. Pastoring in the Mennonite church as an older woman has been challenging and fulfilling and I look forward to more years of continued service.

**Grace Brunner and her husband Paul are co-directors of the Pastoral Ministries Program at Hesston (Kan.) College for a two-year assignment. Grace's interests include working with women in growth groups and Bible studies.**

**"I believe harmony is God's desire for the church, but how is it best achieved?"**

by Eleanor Martens

## On Being a Change Agent in the Mennonite Brethren Church

Like other denominations, the Mennonite Brethren Conference has been struggling with the issue of women in leadership. This past summer it voted against allowing a "diversity of practice" in this regard, thereby upholding a 1981 resolution which restricts women from senior pastorship positions.

Ten years ago I could not have imagined this debate having anything to do with me. I had no interest in preaching or leading a church. I observed with only detached curiosity the conflict between a minority who sought greater inclusiveness in the church and the majority who maintained that male headship was God's "design" for his earthly community. In the secular world, the extreme, often ridiculous images of feminism that I saw repelled rather than attracted me. I could not identify with a movement that seemed opposed to some of the most important things in my life—homemaking, family, the church and men.

The shift in my thinking came in my 40s. I had gone back to university and came across women's literature that struck an affirmative chord deep in my being. Powerful, new emotions arose as I saw in print a reality I had always been sensitive to but somehow was unable to name. I knew it had something to do with Christian women and the Mennonite Brethren church I had grown up in and a discomfort I had always felt, but lacked the words to express.

Although women and men were said to be "equal" under God, women seemed to function as lesser participants in God's kingdom. "Subordination" as it was taught and practiced led to circumstances that seemed dehumanizing to women. They were expected to downplay their own intelligence or giftedness while seeing those of men exalted. Wives were to sacrifice personal aspirations so husbands could fulfill theirs and to "submit" to the abuses often bred by male ascendancy. How could scripture possibly favor an arrangement that led to economic dependence, social isolation and intellectual marginalization? Women made the sacrifices

willingly, believing this is what God required of them, but also whispered hesitantly of somehow feeling "unfulfilled."

The debate as to whether or not women should be pastors therefore represents for me only one aspect of a much larger question: Is the church ready to recognize the full humanity of women by removing the prohibitions that prevent them from fully expressing it? This is most likely why the conference decision last July galvanized some of us into action. Many women left the proceedings shaken, humiliated and hurt not only by the outcome of the vote but by the strident nature of the debate. As small groups huddled in corridors to share their pain, the need for greater solidarity and support became evident.

Our first tentative step was to plan an impromptu church meeting for those who felt uncomfortable with the conference decision. Despite summer vacations, flooded basements and only "word of mouth" publicity, 50 women showed up and spent more than three hours sharing their disappointments and hopes. Many said it was the first time they had ever felt safe enough to express their real feelings on the issue in a church setting. We agreed that the networking must continue.

At the next meeting in October, 150 women and men gathered at a Winnipeg Mennonite Brethren church to worship and to share strategies for change. It was here that the M.B. "Women's Network" was born. A steering committee was formed to provide continuity and direction for the group. Approval was given to a position statement to be circulated for signatures, one that expressed concern with present practices and encouraged further dialogue on the issue. Subgroups were formed to plan future meetings and educational conferences.

Although some of the responses have been encouraging, I often wonder if we will persevere. It is not easy being a Christian "change agent," especially as a woman. Competing interests and loyalties threaten to tear one apart. I want to be "nice" and well-liked by everyone but my convictions urge me to challenge, confront and risk being unpopular. I believe harmony is God's desire for the church, but how is it best achieved? Does a status quo that is hurtful to some represent harmony or brokenness? Keeping a lid on the anger and pain I feel at seeing women misunderstood and misrepresented in the Christian community is truly an exercise in Christian grace. And in my weaker moments, when I consider how a cause that seems so right, so just and so biblical to me can elicit such strong antagonism from others in God's kingdom,



I can't help but wonder whether my own priorities have gone awry.

I do not, however, view it as accidental that God has brought this special sensitivity into my life at this time, along with the time and energy to pursue it. My prayer is for a spirit of humility and love as I seek to be faithful to the vision and opportunities God has provided.

**Eleanor Martens is a writer, wife, mother of three and nurse practicing in the area of community health. She and her husband spent five years serving with MCC in East Africa in health and development work. They attend the McIvor Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg.**

by Renee Sauder

## A Survey—The Experience of Women in Pastoral Ministry

When the history of the Mennonite Church during the 1970s-1990s is written, one of the important developments to be chronicled will be the entry of significant numbers of women into the pastoral ministry.

Since 1973, when Emma Richards became the first woman to be ordained in the Mennonite Church, women have increasingly found pastoral placements in our Mennonite and General Conference congregations. The vast majority of these women have discovered the joys and responsibilities and frustrations of being the "first" wherever they were called to serve.

In 1992, while serving with Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries as coordinator for Women in Pastoral Ministry, I carried out a research study, which sought to examine the experiences of women in pastoral ministry, spanning the time period 1973 to 1993. The results of the study have provided comprehensive information and insights into women's new visibility, changing role and impact on the church.

Of the 186 surveys sent out, 134 were returned, representing a 72 percent response rate. The high rate of return was an indication to me that the survey provided a forum for women to speak openly and candidly about their experiences, and of their desire to add their voice to understanding and determining the future role of women in leadership in our denomination.

The chances that a Mennonite Church in North America will have a woman serving as its next pastor have increased rapidly over the last two decades. One indicator of the pace of that change is the increase in the number of women enrolled in theological seminaries; 82 percent of the respondents have had seminary training. The 19 different seminaries represented in the survey evidence a dramatic and positive shift in the number of women represented in the student body and on the faculty. In the 1970s, women students at

**"...first placements, which often represent entry level or stereotypically female positions, are easier to acquire than second or third placements."**

Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary were effective in advocating for faculty to include in their courses the contributions of women in church history, theology and biblical interpretation, helping shape an institution to be more inclusive of women's interests and concerns.

Despite this positive trend at the seminary level, that data suggests that first placements, which often represent entry level or stereotypically female positions, are easier to acquire than second or third placements. The survey reveals that subsequent pastoral positions reflect a horizontal move rather than a move to a position of more responsibility or opportunity. Forty-one percent of the respondents anticipate that a second placement will be difficult to find.

In answer to the question: "If you leave, do you think the congregation would call another woman?" 76 percent said yes. But when asked, "Did the congregation call another woman?" only 47 percent said yes. Women pastors communicated a variety of congregational attitudes from: "We've done our mission in hiring a female," to "This congregation has compromised with alternating male and female staff," to "I think my congregation really prefers male leadership." These attitudes do not bode well for the vast expansion of hiring women.

The evidence is overwhelming that the role of the conference minister is very influential in shaping the number and quality of placements in congregations. The conference minister plays a key role in the process, whether by using formal authority or informal (but powerful) influence. It is evident that there are variations in the degree to which conference ministers exercise this prerogative.

The attitudinal shift that has allowed women to respond to a call to ministry does not guarantee that women will be accepted in the profession by our churches. The opportunities for women continue to be strikingly limited, and thus women continue to live on the margins of the profession. We are in a new stage that needs advocacy, typified by second placement issues, plateauing in the number of placements and continuing strong reactions against developments in the area of women in ministry. The change is greater than most people think, but smaller than most women would hope for.

For those women in ministry, there is a clear attempt to redefine the status and role of the minister by adding feminine characteristics to the role definition. When describing the personal qualities that they bring to ministry, women use words like nurturing, encouraging and caring. They would define their leadership styles in language that reflects equali-

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**"Together, using every talent and resource at our disposal, we should be striving to bring the good news of the gospel to the world."**

tarian rather than hierachial patterns of decision making and exercise of authority.

For the 52 percent of the respondents who have worked as associates or assistants, they articulate a general sentiment of desiring a more engaged, collegial relationship with their male colleagues. Women expressed the tension they felt of working on staffs where collaboration and mutuality were low priorities. We are in a new era of defining what male-female partnerships in ministry can be, where trust and knowledge is generously shared in order to enhance each other's ministry.

Women indicate that their presence in the pastorate has enabled congregations to affirm the unique contributions women bring to ministry. They bring to ministry a theology that expresses and affirms the experience of women as well as men. Their presence reminds us of the diversity of gifts that the Spirit imparts upon persons in the human family and the challenge to enable all persons to utilize those gifts for the building up of the church.

Women's presence as pastors will continue to challenge the church to explore what quality and inclusiveness require if the church is to remain relevant and faithful. In partnership, women and men rightly express the church's true nature. Together, using every talent and resource at our disposal, we should be striving to bring the good news of the gospel to the world.

Women as pastors is not a passing phenomenon. The respondents to this survey form a chorus that bears a powerful message of a new creation, of an outpouring of an all-inclusive love, of the gospel mandate for all to be part of the body of Christ.

## **Survey Findings**

Among findings of the "Women in Pastoral Ministry Survey" are the following observations, summarized by Renee Sauder:

1. In answer to the question, "What influenced you the most in your decision to pursue pastoral ministry," 82 percent identified "inner call," as the most important factor, far outweighing external factors such as "shoulder tapping" or congregational call.
2. Fifty-one percent of respondents had found a pastoral assignment within six months or less of graduation. The data

#### Publications to Note

*But Why Don't We Go to War?* by Susan Mark Landis, Herald Press, 1993, aims to help upper elementary children understand Jesus' path to peace.

**A Mennonite Woman's Life**  
by Phyllis Pellman Good,  
Good Books, 1993,  
recounts the story of Ruth  
Hershey of Lancaster  
County (1895-1990) as she  
recorded the life of  
Mennonite women in the  
early 1990s with her box  
camera.

suggests that first placements, which often represent entry level or stereotypically "female" positions (52% of respondents have worked as associates or assistants), are easier to acquire than second or third placements. Forty-one percent of respondents anticipate that second or third placements will be difficult to find.

3. In their first placements, 71% of respondents said they were the first women to have filled a pastoral position in that congregation.

4. Ninety-one percent of respondents have had full-time non-pastoral employment. For many women, pastoral ministry is a second or third career and they bring with them a wide array of experience in other professions.

5. Twenty-five women (19%) said the church experienced internal strife because they were called; 11% had the experience of persons leaving the congregation because of their being called. Thirty-six percent said there was some opposition from their congregation to their being ordained.

6. The level of satisfaction for women in ministry is high, and their sense of vocational stability in the congregation is strong. Ninety percent said they "usually" feel accepted and liked by members of their congregation; 49% said their pastoral position offered them maximum opportunity for expression of their talents for ministry; 59% said they were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their pastoral role in the congregation.

7. In answer to the question: "Do you have adequate time to spend with friends and family?" 59% said yes and 41% said no.

8. Twenty-four percent of respondents report being sexually harassed. If you remove the co-pastors with spouse from tabulation, the percentage is 34 percent. It is evident that working with one's spouse is a deterrent to sexual harassment. In answer to the question "by whom," it was reported:

Congregational members	43%
Pastoral colleagues outside congregation	27%
Other pastoral staff	16%
Other church staff	5%
Other	8%

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- **All We're Meant to Be: Biblical Feminism for Today, Third Edition**, by Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, William B. Erdmans, 1992, is a revised version of the now classic work on biblical feminism, "updated for the nineties."
- **What on Earth Can You Do: Making Your Church a Creation Awareness Center** by Donna Lehman, Herald Press, 1993, offers practical suggestions and personal stories of ways congregations can care for God's good earth.
- **Heritage Celebrations: A Guide to Celebrating the History of Your Church** by Wilma McKee, Faith and Life Press, 1994, was written to encourage congregations to celebrate their history and heritage and gain vision for future mission.

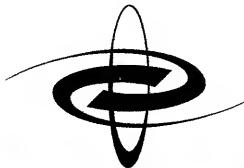
## Letters

The most recent report on "Step and Single Parent Families" caused me to ask, "Why don't they do something on adoptive families?" I can't recall that there has been such an issue.

We adopted 11-month-old twin girls in 1982. They are now 12 and we have been in family therapy for several years, struggling with many things, besides typical pre-adolescent issues, which include: anger, chronic illness and physical health problems (some due to alcohol and/or drug abuse during pregnancy), abuser/victim roles, being twins, abandonment, adoption and "Who am I, where do I belong?"

Over the past three to four years we have had contacts with a number of families who have adopted children in the last 15 years or so and are struggling with the same issues. It is true that you don't have to have adopted children to have severe problems requiring intervention for the family. However, we have come to realize that an adopted family does start out with a lopsided disadvantage, especially when the adopted child is not received as a newborn into the adoptive family. Even though we were assured that our daughters were removed from their birth mother due to neglect, not abuse, the behavior and problems with our daughters has caused us many times to ask, "What really went on in their lives before they came to live with us?"

—Karen Martin, 146 Callan, Evanston, Illinois 60202



by Dorothy Jean Weaver

## Reading Suggestions for "Women Doing Theology"

*We have asked presenters for the upcoming June conference, "Mennonite Voices in Dialogue: Women Doing Theology," to write notes to our readers, suggesting reading you might do in preparation for the conference. Following are suggestions from Dorothy Jean Weaver of Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Va., who will address the topic of "Forgiveness." For more information on the conference see "News and Verbs."*

Much of the reading I do these days is related to my work as a teacher of New Testament at Eastern Mennonite Seminary. It might appear from the outside that a reading list of such books would be heavy and esoteric. But in fact I am often excited by the books I read. Sometimes the experience of reading even becomes worshipful. Let me introduce you to a small collection of books which have elicited a significant "Yes!" from me as I have read them.

A book that has been high on my list of "books to recommend" ever since I first read it is *The Living Word* by James D. G. Dunn (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). Here Dunn offers a sturdy and stimulating discussion of the concept of biblical inspiration and authority of scripture. One of his chapters carries the delightfully provocative title, "Was Jesus a Liberal? Was Paul a Heretic?" While Dunn's major conversation partner appears to be Christian fundamentalism, he engages them in a dialogue which is genuinely respectful and non-polemical. This book provides a thoughtful and well-grounded perspective on the scriptures as "living word." Sadly, however, it is already out of print.

Marianne Meye Thompson speaks a very important word into both the scholarly world and the world of popular perceptions with her book *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988). In this book

Thompson offers a timely corrective to those interpretations of the Gospel of John that view Jesus in a virtually "docetic" light, i.e., as someone so divine that he only "appeared" to be human. Through patient and careful attention to the text of the Gospel, Thompson establishes John's strong and unmistakable portrait of Jesus' humanity as the "Word made flesh."

An entirely different approach to the Gospel of John, but one with an impact similar to Thompson's, is reflected in David Rensberger's book *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988). Here Rensberger paints a strikingly convincing portrait of the community which lies behind the Gospel of John. And in the process he effectively rescues the Gospel from those who insist on spiritualizing John's message. Here is a refreshingly new journey through some very familiar territory.

To read M. Eugene Boring's commentary, *Revelation*, in the Interpretation commentary series (Louisville: John Knox, 1989) is for me an experience of worship. Boring exposes the book of Revelation with solid exegetical grounding, deep theological insight and a genuine passion for the "good news" contained in this letter to the seven churches of Asia Minor. Over against the plethora of popular literature on Revelation that is either superficial or sensational, Boring's volume is a major biblical/theological contribution to the understanding of what is without question the single most abused text within the Christian scriptures. •



by Lena Siegers

## A Gift of Trusting: CPT in Haiti

*Following is a story from Lena Siegers, Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) member currently living and working in Jeremie, Haiti. The two denominational women's groups, WMSC (Mennonite Church) and Women in Mission (General Conference), as well as MCC Women's Concerns, are raising funds to sponsor Lena's work with CPT. To contribute, send checks designated for Lena's support to: CPT, P.O. Box 6508, Chicago, IL 60680-6508.*

A young man came to us today and said he wanted to talk. He is from Fort Bequier, a Jeremie community not far from where I live with three other CPT members and our interpreter. I was apprehensive about trusting him enough to have a meeting, because his community is noted for its notorious FRAPH problems, and we had not checked this guy out with our priest to see if he was trustworthy. We decided to meet with him, but be careful about what we discussed.

I soon realized that he was giving us a gift of confidence and trust. He came to encourage us and tell us how much he and others in his community appreciated our presence in Jeremie. "In February when you people came down to check on the screaming and fighting in Fort Bequier, many were glad you came. It gives us courage to stand when we feel your support. The FRAPH have no real power here. They just want to intimidate us and keep us from meeting together."

We asked him who people say we are. He said, "We know you are for the people. I want you to walk through our community more often. You give us courage." This young man has real courage. He risked further FRAPH harassment by coming here to talk to whites. His contact strengthened the power of our presence. We received his gift of confidence and trust with thankfulness. I went away happy and sad—happy that there are people like this young man who take great risks to stand up for what they believe, and sad that the political situation here is so bad that we can trust no one until we thoroughly scrutinize them. •

#### Women in Ministry

- **Helen Hopson** was ordained October 10 at Evanston (Ill.) Mennonite Church. She is now serving as assistant director of Pastoral Services at Philhaven Hospital in Mount Gretna, Pa.
- **Norma Peters Duerksen** was licensed October 10 as associate pastor at Oak Grove Mennonite Church in Smithville, Ohio.
- **Gladys and Peter Buller** are serving a one-year pastoral care term at Olive Mennonite Church near Elkhart, Ind.
- **Charlotte Bueckert** has begun as youth pastor at Zoar Mennonite Church in Waldheim, Sask.
- **Brenda Glanzer** was ordained December 12 at Hope Mennonite Church, Wichita, Kan.

## News and Verbs

- Mennonite poet Julia Kasdorf of Brooklyn, N.Y., author of *The Sleeping Preacher*, and organist Cynthia Neufeld Smith of Topeka, Kan., will be **featured artists** at a Friday night arts evening during "**Mennonite Voices in Dialogue: Women Doing Theology**," a June 23-25 conference to be at Bluffton (Ohio) College. The conference is sponsored by MCC Women's Concerns and Bluffton College. Pre-registration is required. For information contact: Tina Mast Burnett, Women's Concerns, Box 500, Akron, PA 17501; 717-859-3889.
- Many of you have already responded to the call for a subscription fee for *Women's Concerns Report*. Unless you return your subscription notice, this is the last issue you will receive. Questions, contact Tina Mast Burnett, editor (see address above).
- Charlotte Holsopple Glick is **new conference minister for Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference**. She previously pastored Waterford Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., and more recently spent two years in the Peoples Republic of China with China Educational Exchange.
- Doris Gascho of Kitchener has been appointed **conference minister of the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada**. She is completing eight years as co-pastor of Shantz Mennonite Church in Baden, Ont.
- "Lord, Hear Our Prayers," a MCC Canada worship resource packet on **domestic violence and sexual abuse**, contains calls to worship, litanies, hymns, prayers and sermon themes. It is available from all MCC offices. Suggested donation, \$5.
- Two \$850 scholarships for **Mennonite women studying in a non-Mennonite graduate program** are available from the Women's Missionary and Service Commission (WMSC) of the Mennonite Church. The application deadline for 94-95 is June 1, 1994. For application form call WMSC at 219-294-7131. WMSC scholarships are also available for women attending Mennonite institutions; applications for those scholarships should be made directly to the college or seminary.
- In 1993, 15,740 pounds of used books were sent to 31 overseas countries and 16 North American locations through **Books Abroad and At Home**, a grassroots ministry coordinated by WMSC. Through the program, good used books go to libraries, schools, hospitals, churches, etc. For more information contact Marian Hostetler, WMSC, 421 S. 2nd St., Suite 600, Elkhart, IN 46516.
- MCC Alberta Women's Concerns and Community Justice Ministries are planning a **Conference on Family Violence** to be September 30-Oct. 1, 1994, in Calgary. Carolyn Holderread Heggen will be the featured speaker.
- Goshen (Ind.) College is seeking applicants for **female residence hall director**. For job description contact Office of Dean of Students, Goshen College, Goshen IN 46526; 219-535-7539.
- Carol Ann Weaver, associate professor of music at Conrad Grebel College, presented the 14th annual Benjamin Eby Lecture at the college on "**Kenyan Women's Music: Agents of Social, Cultural Change?**"
- Dr. Dorothy Gish has been named **acting dean of Messiah College**, Grantham, Pa., replacing Dr. Harold Heie. Gish has been associate dean of the faculty.
- Twenty-five women from the Church of the Brethren announced at an ecumenical conference in November that **they will no longer use the denomination's name because it is sexist**. The women have opted for the name "Church of Reconciliation." Denominational leaders have appointed a committee to study whether a committee should be appointed to study a change in the denomination's name. (From a report in *Christianity Today*).

**Illustrations in this issue were  
drawn by Teresa Pankratz of  
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# THE QUIET IN THE LAND?

*Women of Anabaptist Traditions in Historical Perspective*

## Call for Papers

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is edited by Kristina Mast Burnett. Layout by Janice Wiebe Ollenburger. Correspondence and address changes should be send to Kristina Mast Burnett, Women's Concerns, MCC, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.

Subscription is \$10 U.S./\$15 Cadn. for one year and \$20 U.S./\$25 Cadn. for two years. Send all subscriptions to Women's Concerns, MCC, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500. Canadians may pay in Canadian currency.

*This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.*



**Mennonite  
Central  
Committee**

21 South 12th Street  
PO Box 500  
Akron, PA  
17501-0500



The first academic conference on Anabaptist Women's History is planned for **June 8-11, 1995**, at Millersville University in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

The purpose of the conference is to bring together historians and other scholars of women to examine women's experiences in Anabaptist traditions from the 16th through the 20th centuries (Amish, Mennonite, Hutterite, Brethren, and other communal societies and Pietist groups). The committee encourages proposals that represent a broad range of disciplines and consider a spectrum of difference in such areas as race, class, region, sexuality, and nationality.

**PROPOSALS FOR SINGLE PAPERS/PRESENTATIONS**  
should include a 500-word abstract and a one-page CV.  
**COMPLETE SESSIONS** should include a brief description of the session, names of the presenters, CVs, and paper abstracts.  
**ALL MATERIALS SHOULD BE SUBMITTED BY OCTOBER 1, 1994**, to Diane Zimmerman Umble, The Quiet in the Land Conference, P.O. Box 1002, Millersville University, Millersville, PA 17551. For more information, call 717-872-3233, fax 717-871-2003, email [Di\\_Umble@dauffy.millersv.edu](mailto:Di_Umble@dauffy.millersv.edu).

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